

Infidelity Exposed.

THE FALL OF GERRIT SMITH;

OR,

INFIDELITY AT PETERBORO, NEW YORK.

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THE FALL OF GERRIT SMITH,

OR, INFIDELITY AT PETERBORO.

MR. GERRIT SMITH, of Peterboro, New York, has fallen; fallen into the ranks of infidelity. It is properly a "fall," because he was once a reputable Christian; and, if we mistake not, a member in good standing of the Presbyterian Church. He is a gentleman of fine talents, of a certain generosity of spirit, and of good social position; all of which tend to magnify his fall. If Mr. Gerrit Smith had kept his wicked aberrations to himself, we should have been spared the obligation to criticize his performance. But he openly avows and vindicates his shame. He has published his lucubrations in a newspaper of wide circulation.* Mr. Gerrit Smith's "Discourse at Peterboro," appears with the heading of an "Advertisement." To pay for seven and a half columns shows, at least, the author's zeal in a bad cause—a very common thing, by the bye.

Mr. Gerrit Smith entitles his discourse "*The Religion of Reason.*" Like Mr. Thomas Paine, who wrote "*The Age of Reason,*" and Mr. Charles Blount, who wrote "*The Oracles of Reason;*" Mr. Gerrit Smith advocates "*The Religion of Reason.*" He unites with these, and all other infidel writers, in rejecting the Word of God, and in exalting human reason as a competent, and the best guide in matters of religion. We propose to exhibit, and to examine, some of the views of this gentleman, who has fallen from the privileges of religious training into the perversions of an infidel and blaspheming philosophy.

I. *The dignity of human nature*, as a means of understanding the divine, is one of the dogmas of the Peterboro philosophy. Mr. Gerrit Smith, possessing great faith in man's natural goodness, even thinks that the attributes of God, and the principles of His moral government, may be clearly inferred from human traits of character. He reasons thus:—

"It is a sound rule in logic, to begin with the known, and proceed to the unknown; to begin with what is self-evident, and proceed to what requires proof. . . . The proposition is, that nature teaches there is a strong resemblance between God and man. . . . We infer the moral nature of God from that of man. We deduce the former from our knowledge of the latter. We know that man's moral nature is good, and therefore that God's is. Man is loving and merciful, and appreciates truth and equity. Goodness is natural to him."

Let us apply Gerrit Smith's "sound rule of logic," and begin with what is "known" and "self-evident." Is there any one truth,

* The New York Tribune.

then, belonging to the history of the race, more definitely ascertained, than man's wickedness? How can the sage of Peterboro deny that every trait of fallen humanity belongs to the race, and that, where there is no revelation, society is in a state of corruption and pollution? Mr. Smith seems to have thought of this terrible fact, when he says: "Most persons will recoil from the inference of God's goodness from man's. Their eye is on the masses of men; but *the masses are only the ruins of men.*" Here is an acknowledgment worth receiving. Mr. Smith is so violent an opponent of total depravity, that he cries out, "Let the theologians continue to insist on the badness, baseness, and blindness of human nature." "I know," says he, "that this doctrine of the goodness of human nature must shock some of my hearers—for they, and indeed nearly all of us, were trained up to believe in its total depravity. Would that men universally had faith in its goodness! Such faith would serve mightily to lift up their lives to the high level of their nature!" And yet "the masses are only the ruins of men!" Alas! so they have always been, in every stage of society, and in every condition of life, and in every age. If we reason, therefore, according to that "sound rule of logic," from what is known, we are left to infer God's attributes from masses of moral pollution and death.

But, says Mr. Smith, we must look at humanity in its best form, and "should judge of it by good men." But who ever heard of good men, where revelation has not purified society? Our missionaries declare that there is no good or moral man among the heathen. "The religion of nature" is, of itself, unacquainted with practical morality and virtue. It answers the description given of it by Paul, in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. All the virtue, possessed by Mr. Smith himself, has been derived from his mother's training, which he spurns; from God's Word, which he tramples under his feet; and from the ministry of reconciliation, which he contemns with abhorrence. His "religion of reason," if left to itself, in all the folly of its aspirings, would overwhelm its abettors in the common ruins of the masses.

Mr. Gerrit Smith vindicates the terrible tendency of human nature to go to ruin, on the plea that "the religions of the world are mainly responsible for its crimes." But are not the religions of the heathen the "religion of nature?" Where else than from nature, do the cannibals of the South Seas and the impure Buddhists of India, and the degraded followers of Confucius obtain their religion? Man must have some religion; and if the religion of revelation be denied him, he will fall back upon, and down into, the religion of nature. Hence, "the masses are only the ruins of men." And it is among these ruins, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, that Mr. Gerrit Smith must study God and "find out the Almighty to perfection!"

II. Mr. Gerrit Smith's views of human nature prompt him to *reject the Bible as a divine revelation.* Let him speak for himself.

"But it is held that these things, which are so at war with Nature and Providence, are affirmed by the Bible. I do not admit that they are. Certainly they are not by the Bible as a whole. But even if they were, that would not prove them to be true. It would only prove that, so far the Bible is false. Whether these things are true or false, is a question to be referred not to the umpirage of a book, but to the infinitely higher one of Nature and Providence.

"But is not the Bible the word of God? It is no further such than it corresponds with the manifestations of God. It is to be judged by Nature and Providence. Most religionists, very foolishly turning their backs upon the sure light that Creation and Providence shed upon this subject, as foolishly acknowledge the words of a book to be conclusive upon it.

"But is not the Bible inspired? The spirit of much of it comes, I admit, from the heavenly fount. Very common earthly sources, however, would be adequate to supply most of the remainder. No other pages are so full of the Divine presence and power as are a part of its pages. But there are pages of the Bible which might have been written by entire strangers to that presence and power.

"The Bible is the work of man, and hence even its best pages must bear the marks of human imperfection. But the volume of nature is written by the finger of God, and is, therefore, as free from error as Himself. What, however, is the Bible, or rather a Bible, that we are bound to adopt the whole of it unquestioningly, and to worship it, and to insist that there is not in the whole of it one unsound doctrine, nor one false sentiment? I wish all the clergy would tell their hearers that it is simply a selection from ancient writings—a selection, too, made by persons who no one claims were inspired.

"Perhaps both the Catholic and Protestant Bibles take in too many of these writings: perhaps too few. Were I to make up a Bible for myself, it might differ much from both. It might be inferior, possibly it might be superior to both."

Mr. Gerrit Smith, like Mr. Thomas Hobbes, ridicules the Bible, but likes to quote from it in proof of the religion of nature. In spite too of his high regard for the dignity of human nature, he hardens himself into quite a contempt for the writers of revelation and for all who receive its authority. Appealing, as he does, to "good men" in vindication of the ability of human nature to instruct itself concerning God, yet, when good men believe in the religion of revelation, and not in the religion of nature, there is no insinuation, even such as deceivers, hypocrites, tyrants, which this inconsistent son of nature, cannot lavish upon them with all the opprobrium of cunning unbelief.

1. There is no clashing between reason and revelation. Revelation is the highest perfection of reason. It is light from heaven, added to the natural light of the human understanding.

2. Why should Mr. Gerrit Smith, and other infidels, have so much prejudice against receiving a part of their knowledge of God through the minds of inspired men? If God, according to their dogma, makes Himself known by *universal* human nature, may He not specially endow some of His creatures with higher revelations of His perfections? And if the knowledge of the nature of God can be inferred from the nature of His creatures, may it not also be demonstratively and authoritatively disclosed through the minds of some, for the benefit of all?

3. A revelation of God's perfections may be surely made in

the exigencies of a lost world, is explained to be a mere system of pagan ceremonies, through which an ingenious conceit was practised upon mankind at the time of the crucifixion. Entertaining such views, it is no wonder that Mr. Gerrit Smith should hold up the miraculous conception of the Son of God as "a substantial *repetition of the fable of Plato*, who was believed to be the offspring of a god and virgin." Few infidels have ever ventured upon the exhibition of so malicious a spirit against God's beloved Son, as this Christian-trained philosopher.

In regard to sacrifices, it may be well to note, in passing, their objects in the Divine system of ordinances, under the old dispensation. The design of sacrifices was, (1) to impress upon the mind of the offerer the sinfulness of his condition; (2) to encourage his hope of forgiveness through the propitiated favour of the Deity; (3) to teach him that the pardon of sin was connected with the shedding of blood; and (4) to typify, and point to, the coming sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ.

On the supposition that God designed to teach the atonement of Jesus Christ through the Jewish sacrifices, we have an important admission through Mr. Gerrit Smith in favour of the plan as an effectual and thorough one. For, says he, "The atonement would not be held to at this day, if Paul had not taught it. Paul would not have taught it, had he not been a Jew. The Jews would not have received it, but for their faith in animal sacrifices." So that the infidel unconsciously concedes the importance of Old Testament training in its relation to the work of Jesus Christ, as unfolded more fully in the New Testament.

Whether Paul said much, or "little," about the atonement, may be discovered by the biblical reader in searching the Epistles to the Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, &c.; whether, had he said more, it would have pleased Mr. Gerrit Smith better, may be inferred without reading. The assertion that "Jesus did not teach the atonement" forms, in all probability, a part of the "superior" revelation, or Gospel according to Mr. Gerrit Smith. Our Lord taught the atonement, according as the people were able to bear it. The following passages are sufficiently explicit. "I am the good Shepherd; the good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." John 10: 11. "I lay down my life for the sheep." 15. "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again." 17. "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he saith, signifying what death he should die." John 13: 32. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." 16: 13. "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whoso believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3: 14, 15.

2. Nature declares that mere repentance is not sufficient to remove the transgressions of the past. Mankind have in all ages resorted

to sacrifices and to self-inflicted pains and penalties with a view to propitiate the Deity. This unquestioned fact shows, at least, that the natural conviction of the race is not inconsistent with rigorous views of the Divine justice, and the necessity of gaining God's favour by other means than mere penitence. Mr. Gerrit Smith has precluded himself from taking advantage of the plea that pagan sacrifices are the traditional remnants of ancient revelation; for, in order to meet other ends of his argument—and it has many loose ends—he maintains that the divinely constituted system of Jewish sacrifices was borrowed, or stolen, from the heathen. He admits that the whole world, Jews and Gentiles, “attributed to God a burning wrath which blood and suffering could alone appease.” We put it to him, then, that if the pagans, including the enlightened Romans and Greeks, as well as the Jews, resorted to sacrifices, as part of the “religion of nature,” is not the concession fatal to his own views of the facility with which God, in the light of nature, can be supposed to forgive sin?

According to Nature and Providence, great blessings and benefits accrue to individuals through the agency of others. The merit, rank, or influence, of a third party, prevails, to rescue a private or public offender from punishment, and to pardon the guilty. In times of emergency, Providence has, not unfrequently, raised up distinguished personages to save nations from temporal and political destruction. These, and similar principles and facts, do not, indeed, cover the whole ground of an atonement; but they are sufficient to show that a Mediator, and even a suffering Mediator, is a doctrine which neither Nature nor Providence frowns upon with the scorn of Mr. Gerrit Smith.

It is also a *fact*, in Providence, that the atonement meets the wants of sinners of every class and condition, in every country, and in every age. Nature never uttered, in all her history, a more accredited truth than that “the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin.” Tens of thousands out of “the masses in ruins,” and out of every grade of life, in all generations, confront skeptical philosophers with this witness of human experience: “I know in whom I have believed;” “in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.” “God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

IV. One other point in Mr. Gerrit Smith's creed of infidelity, requires a few remarks. We allude to his views of God's system of retribution. The idea of eternal punishment gives no satisfaction to scoffing philosophy.

“When, too, we are told that God has prepared an eternal hell—a place of endless and inconceivably exquisite tortures—for a large share of his children, we are sure that this shocking picture finds no counterpart and no warrant in creation and Providence. These tell us of a father, and not of a fiend; of love, and not of hatred; of forgiveness, and not of revenge. These tell us that in all

ages God has made 'his sun to rise on the evil and on the good,' and has sent his 'rain on the just and on the unjust;' and these bid us hope that in other worlds, as well as in this, He will still be the father and the friend of men. Again, if men are miserable here, it is not of his infliction, but because they make themselves so; yes, and make themselves so in the midst of the numberless and sufficient means He has provided for making themselves happy. If in this world men persevere in ruining themselves, it is in the face of His perseverance to save them. And why should it be otherwise in other worlds? From nothing we see of God is he changeable. We are bound to believe that he is as ready to afford his children opportunities in one stage of being, as well as in another, for the improvement of their character; and that he is ever intent, as much so in one world as in another, to do them good, and not evil. And why should we doubt that God is as forgiving in another life as in this? Would Jesus have told us to set no limits to the times of forgiving our brother, had he believed that the exercise of God's forgiving spirit is confined to this first brief stage of human existence? Would he have told us to be so much better than he believed God to be?

"Eternal hell! Then must sin be an eternally disturbing force in the universe. For manifestly when sin shall have ceased, punishment will also.

"Eternal hell! Yes, and it is to be suffered by men of the loveliest character, provided they were not able to subscribe in this life to certain ecclesiastical interpretations of a book.

"Putting people into an eternal hell! Why, the worst of men would not thus serve their worst enemies. How much less would God! Orthodoxy makes God infinitely more malignant and cruel than are the most malignant and cruel men.

"Eternal hell! No man does, and no man can believe it. It is untrue, if only because human nature is incapable of believing it. Moreover, were such a belief possible, it would be fatal.

"We are wont to lament the prevailing want of religious earnestness. But should we not rather rejoice in it, seeing how monstrous are the religions? With what a good stomach we should hate, and crush, and kill one another, if we really believed that we are such devils as our religions picture us to be! Once persuade me that God is waiting to roast my neighbour, and the way is made easier for persuading me that I shall do God service by hurrying that neighbour with a dagger or bullet into the prepared fire."

Christianity brings "life and immortality to light." It reveals the certainty of the immortality of the soul, and of a future state. The religion of nature, in its own strength, never solved these mysteries. The most enlightened sages of antiquity had only feeble glimpses and hopes. Mr. Gerrit Smith thinks he can argue a future state from nature, and he attempts it with that facility of complacence which characterizes, occasionally, a "broad-minded" man. But some of his own principles pinch the broadness of his consistency with no uncertain incision. For example, he says, "To be frank, I suppose all enlightened and broad-minded men do, at least, doubt the truth of miracles. They have never seen any, and hence they are slow to yield to even abounding testimony in their behalf." According to this announcement, the philosopher of Peterboro must be slow to believe in a future state; for he has "never seen any." And the testimony of Nature is not very abounding; but even if it were, he would be slow to yield his belief in what his eyes had never seen.

Assuming a future state, Mr. Gerrit Smith becomes a Universalist on certain principles of "reason and nature," which we proceed to examine.

1. Eternal punishment, says Mr. Gerrit Smith, makes God "a fiend." Yet God certainly punishes in this world. Because he is a wise father, he subjects his children to punishment and discipline. Nature and Providence demonstrate God's hatred of sin and his penalties upon the guilty. It is true that he "makes his sun to rise upon the evil and the good, and sends his rain upon the just and the unjust." He also sends clouds, lightning, tornado, pestilence, famine, sickness, suffering. There are many common blessings, and common troubles, for all mankind; but is there, therefore, no retribution here? Surely Providence, even in this life, discloses the distinction between virtue and vice, bestowing rewards upon the one and inflicting penalties upon the other. Conscience, which is the voice of nature, witnesses against and punishes sin; and Providence has ordained laws in society which frown upon offenders and secure their punishment. Shall God be called a "fiend," if in another world He allows conscience and retribution to do their work in a more unrestricted and enduring form?

The question is, then, narrowed down to one of *duration*. But we see sinners exposed to suffering and retribution all through this life, and actually living and dying "without hope and without God." In the language of Mr. Gerrit Smith, "why should it be otherwise in other worlds?"

A change of state does not imply a change of character. Even if we, of Adam's race, could not understand why punishment should continue forever, may not God justify it, in His own infinite mind, by the necessities of his moral government? The kindest Governor of a State may have the wisest reasons for keeping in confinement for life a condemned criminal, although the prisoner might fail to understand and appreciate those reasons. Shall we not grant to the everliving God the benefit of a wisdom unknown to His creatures?

Besides, death presents every appearance of being the conclusion of a probation, or dispensation; as we know from revelation that it actually is so. The framework of the body is taken down; its organization is destroyed; its ends have been answered; death closes the scene. Conscience looks beyond. If enlightened, its office is not only to punish for the past by remorse, but to look forward into the future with apprehension. Hence unusual signs in the heavens, or in external nature, always fill the world with fear. Now the use we make of these intimations is that, so far as the light of nature points to another world, it is not with the expectation that that world is to be a mere continuance of the arrangements of this one. On the contrary, Nature herself seems to suggest that death, instead of suspending, only confirms retribution, and renders another world more dreadful to the sinner than this one.

2. The fact that God affords multiplied opportunities of salvation in this life, does not imply that these opportunities will be continued forever. Nature and Providence give additional indications

to the contrary, such as the following: (1.) If the farmer does not sow in the spring, he will gather nothing into his barns in the autumn. May not this life bear something of the relation of spring to eternity? (2.) Character is early formed, and habit becomes a second nature of almost irresistible authority; so that youth seems to be the only very promising period in which to acquire true virtue and religion. If habit, as a general rule, thus stamps itself into the life of a man of fourscore, what is there to make it likely that he would change his ways at five hundred scores, or amidst the protracted slavery of an endless life? (3.) Opportunities, once lost, have been lost forever, in the pecuniary, political, social, educational, spiritual experience of every individual. These losses have caused regrets, and tears, and anguish; but they have never been regained. Was God a "fiend" because he did not perpetuate these advantageous opportunities all through this life? And will he be less paternal, if the exigencies of his moral government, in another life, shall require him to arrest them there altogether?

But says Mr. Gerrit Smith, appealing to revelation, Jesus urged forgiveness unto seventy times seven among men, and will God's forgiveness be "confined to this first brief stage of human existence?" If Jesus be appealed to, we reply in the words of Jesus: "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not *perish*, but have everlasting life." Because a father tells his children to love one another, does it follow that that father must not punish them in the proportion due in his judgment to their transgression?

3. "Then must sin be an eternally disturbing force in the universe," objects Mr. Gerrit Smith. To which we reply, an eternally *existing*, but *subdued* force—a force, overcome, imprisoned, punished. Not a "disturbing" force any more than a penitentiary disturbs society.

4. Again, he says: "An eternal hell is to be suffered by men of the loveliest character, provided they were not able to subscribe to certain ecclesiastical interpretations of a book." We reply, that men of outward moral appearance may conceal the bitterest spiritual enmity within. God requires the heart, and not mere morality. Men may be as the Pharisees, fair and decent, and even ornamented by an external display of virtue, and yet be inwardly, like sepulchres, filled with dead men's bones. Sinners will not be condemned on ecclesiastical grounds, but for violating the Divine law, for rejecting revelation, and above all, for not believing in the Lord that bought them. "Lovely" men may do all this as well as the profane and openly vicious.

5. "The worst of men would not thus serve their worst enemies." Let the infidels of the French Revolution attest what the worst of men will do with their enemies, when they get them within their power. But the question is not between man and man in private life. It is a question between the magistrate and crimi-

nals, between Jehovah and the rejecters of law and grace. A private individual would be very unwilling to imprison, or to hang, his worst enemy; but if he were the Governor of the State, he might sign the death-warrant without compunction, yea, with a high regard for the public interests.

6. "No man does, and no man can believe in a hell. It is untrue, simply because human nature is incapable of believing it." Human nature, depraved enough, will indeed resort to its inability in efforts to shun responsibility. But the feelings of interested, depraved, and ignorant beings are of little account in an argument; for if God himself can believe a doctrine, no one need think of escaping from the guilt of rejecting it on the plea of incapacity. Human nature seems capable of believing every absurd and wicked notion of the devil, but professes to be "incapable" of receiving the words of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our blessed Saviour was capable of saying, "He that believeth shall be saved; and he that believeth not shall be damned." Why is Mr. Gerrit Smith incapable of believing it?

7. "Once persuade me that God is waiting to roast my neighbour, and the way is made easier for persuading me that I shall do God service by hurrying that neighbour with a bullet or dagger into the prepared fire." This sentiment, by the way shows how important it is for a man to have a right belief, and what deeds of wickedness a lovely man may become capable of doing, with a wrong one. It also shows how false philosophers are capable of forging a misrepresentation. But, granting that Mr. Gerrit Smith states the doctrine of eternal punishment fairly, yet is it not a fact that those who believe in the doctrine are, as a class, the strictest moralists in the community? And if it be "a sound rule in logic to begin with the known," then reason will require Mr. Gerrit Smith to change his irrational, prejudiced, and irreligious phraseology.

We have neither time nor inclination to follow Mr. Gerrit Smith through all the shocking utterances of his long Discourse. Our purpose has been to expose some of his principal errors. Fearful is the responsibility incurred by a writer, who has the hardihood to ridicule Christianity, and to undermine the popular faith in a Divine revelation.

By what process, it may be asked, has a person, who once professed his faith in Christ, been made to suffer so awful a fall as that of Mr. Gerrit Smith? Let us endeavour calmly, fairly, and plainly to answer this question.

In the first place, Mr. Gerrit Smith has been known as a man inclined to *ultraism*, on all questions of reform. The use of wine, for example, is adjudged by him to be *malum in se*; slaveholding is, under all circumstances, sinful, &c. &c. The Bible not favouring his views on these and other subjects, he has been led to regard

revelation with indifference, then with doubt, and finally with hatred.

In the second place, ultraism brought Mr. Gerrit Smith into bad company. Leaving, gradually, the counsels and the fellowship of the people of God, he has cultivated the society of unbelievers, pseudo-reformers, champions of fanaticism, and the host of devotees to all sorts of delusions. The unfortunate influence of such association over a susceptible, excitable, and unbalanced mind, can be readily conceived.

In the third place, a love of fame is apt to become a burning passion in the breast of persons of this class. They set themselves up as the leaders of the age. A more ambitious, arrogant, applause-loving class of persons scarcely assemble beneath the sun, than these extreme advocates of temperance, abolitionism, women's rights, spiritualism, &c. The rage of notoriety has upset many a craft with gaudious colours at its mast-head, and with "reform" painted on its stern. Mr. Gerrit Smith aspired to be Governor of the State of New York; and failing in that ambition, seems willing to become king among infidels.

Then, in the fourth place, these aspiring, restless spirits become chafed under the ill success which their foolish schemes meet with in society, and begin to rave more and more; and, like all seducers, wax worse and worse. They learn to fret, to blaspheme, to speak evil of dignitaries, to defy the living God, and to follow, if not take the lead of Satan. Disappointment exasperates their proud and scheming souls.

Finally, God himself forsakes these false teachers, and gives them over to strong delusion, "that they may believe a lie." When the Spirit withdraws from men, their downward career is swift. The despisers of God find themselves overtaken by retribution at last. The fair prospects of their opening manhood become overclouded; and their unhallowed and presumptuous creed bears forth the fruits of spiritual desolation. "Professing themselves to be wise, they become fools;" and their last state is worse than their first.

To call such men philanthropists, is a calumny upon language. They are the enemies of God, and of their fellow-men.